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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 000114

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KU](#)

SUBJECT: SENATOR KERRY AND KUWAITI FM AGREE ON NEED FOR
SUNNI ROLE IN NEW IRAQ; ADDRESS IRAN AND THE PEACE PROCESS

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[11.](#) (C) Summary: In a 45-minute discussion January 7, Senator John Kerry and Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah discussed the necessity of holding elections in Iraq on January 30 and the importance of Sunni participation in the elections and representation in Iraq's future government. Dr. Mohammed said elections are the start of a process, not an end result, and sought assurances that the U.S. would not begin to disengage after elections. Senator Kerry reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to helping Iraq achieve stability and security, and also stressed the U.S. commitment to supporting Arab states pursuing political and economic reform programs. The two also discussed other regional threats including Iran's nuclear aspirations and Syrian and Iranian meddling in Iraq. Senator Kerry further restated U.S. appreciation for Kuwait's assistance to and political support for Operation Iraqi Freedom. End Summary.

Senator Kerry to Kuwait: Couldn't Have Done It Without You

[12.](#) (C) Senator Kerry opened the meeting by expressing U.S. gratitude for Kuwait's support to OIF, noting Kuwait's significant fuel contributions and the territory allocated for basing and training of U.S. and coalition forces. The Senator added that the U.S. understood that, at times, this support has created difficulties for the Government of Kuwait (GOK), and stressed the U.S. was deeply appreciative. Foreign Minister Shaykh Dr. Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah commented "we're all in this together" and said Kuwait was grateful for U.S. efforts to promote peace and security in Iraq. He also deeply regretted the number of Americans who gave their lives for this cause.

Iraq Elections: New Start for Iraq and the Region

[13.](#) (C) The Senator then briefed Dr. Mohammed on his January 5-6 visit to Baghdad, Falluja, Kirkurk, and Mosul and asked for Dr. Mohammed's observations on developments in Iraq. Dr. Mohammed said he had just returned from the Neighbors' Conference in Amman where participants unanimously agreed that elections must occur in Iraq, describing them as a means to achieve a unified Iraq in which an elected National Assembly can begin to shape the country's future. He added Iraq's neighbors also reasserted their support for UNSCR [1546](#). He also shared regional concerns that the U.S. views elections as part of an "exit strategy." He emphasized that elections are part of a process to help Iraq become peaceful and stable, a collaborative effort that requires substantial and sustained American involvement.

Creative Thinking/Regional Collaboration A Must for Sunni

[14.](#) (C) Further commenting on the conference, Dr. Mohammed reported the absence of senior Iranian participants and said Syria attended and even appealed to Iran's Foreign Minister to attend. Iran, which Dr. Mohammed said has the most to lose if elections do not occur, objected to King Abdullah's statements on their meddling in Iraq and allegations that Iran seeks the establishment of another Shi'a state in the region. Dr. Mohammed argued that Iraq must not become a sectarian state and called for creative ways to encourage Sunni participation in the late January polling. He said there had been talk among the neighbors and the Iraqis about allowing voting to continue beyond January 30. He opined if Sunnis do not go to polls in great numbers, it would not be a boycott, rather a reflection of their fear. Nonetheless, the Sunni must be represented in Iraq's government and if they are not part of the legislative branch, they must be adequately represented at the executive level.

[15.](#) (C) Dr. Mohammed said it would be a good idea for the Foreign Minister of the new Iraqi government to be a Sunni. Although he had great admiration for current the Foreign Minister, a Kurd, he said a Sunni could do more to elicit the

vigorous support that will be needed from Iraq's neighbors.

16. (C) Responding to the Senator's question about Arab state leverage on Iraq's Sunni community, Dr. Mohammed said the Arab states have no influence and said the IIG must isolate those Sunni who cannot even imagine Shi'a rule in Iraq and win over the Sunni who prefer to delay elections. He also called for the IIG to do a better job on public relations with the Arab world which needs to hear: Iraq is a part of the Arab world; Iraq wants to become a regional example of modernity and openness; and Iraq is not a haven for sectarian rule.

17. (C) Senator Kerry agreed on the need for Sunni participation in elections and representation in Iraq's elected government. He also agreed that elections are part of a process and not an end result, commenting it would be dangerous to equate holding elections to success. He reconfirmed the U.S. commitment to Iraq and identified as a prerequisite for any diminishing of a U.S. presence the successful transfer of security responsibilities to Iraq. He said he considered it a mistake to disband the Iraqi army and remove all Baathists from positions of authority and influence. These decisions made rebuilding Iraq all the more difficult because U.S. and coalition forces had to not only reestablish security, but also recreate the structures for basic services. The Senator said it was possible to provide security and services, but it would be easier with more assistance, especially from the Arab world.
A War of the Wills

18. (C) Dr. Mohammed replied that the war in Iraq is a war for the future, a battle between groups with fundamentally different outlooks for the Arab world. There are those who favor democracy and openness, believing Iraq could become a model state. In contrast, others support the continuation of the fascist regimes for which the region is known. Dr. Mohammed asserted people in the region are ready for change, and said some governments deserve more credit than they are getting. For example, he did not believe Saudi Arabia is being treated fairly, referring to a January 1, 2005 New York Times editorial that linked the KSA to terror financing. He described Saudi Arabia as being at civil war and feared additional external pressure would erode public support for reform efforts such as allowing women to vote in municipal elections.

Iran Wants a Real Persian Gulf

19. (C) Turning to other regional issues, Dr. Mohammed called Iran the biggest threat to Gulf countries, stating its nuclear program represented a long-term, strategic threat. He said other Gulf countries were also concerned about Bahraini lands claimed by Iran, Iranian occupation of islands belong to the United Arab Emirates, and an ongoing dispute with Qatar on gas. He said Iran was seeking to undermine all of the Gulf governments and sought the establishment of a truly "Persian Gulf." In his assessment, most Iranians wanted more openness, but direct criticism of the regime, such as recent statements by King Abdullah on creation of a Shi'a crescent or consideration as part of the axis-of-evil, challenged Iranians' sense of nationalism, forcing them to align themselves with the state.

Don't Forget the Peace Process

10. (C) Dr. Mohammed also said the Arab-Israeli peace process was linked to the situation in Iraq and the two issues, both of which required focused U.S. attention, could not be separated. He encouraged the U.S. to engage Syria, noting general consensus on the requirement to return the Golan Heights. Senator Kerry reminded Dr. Mohammed that the situation had previously been close to resolution, and Syria's habit of being a troublemaker whenever the peace process stagnates complicated the matter. Kerry said there had been ample outreach to the GOS and the only enticement should be the ultimate benefits of resolving its problems with Israel. He also hoped that January 9 Palestinian elections would create conditions for future negotiations. Dr. Mohammed expressed optimism and said President Bashar Al-Asad was trustworthy; the problem was individuals in his government, including Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Shara', who disobey his instructions.

Kuwait Gives Failing Grade for U.S. Public Diplomacy

11. (C) Dr. Mohammed concluded by saying that U.S. ideas and values were welcome in the region, and there were signs of economic and political reform. The U.S. would be more successful, however, if it did a better job of public diplomacy. He was complimentary of BMENA, but said the initiative was harmed initially by its delivery. He also

said the stories of abuse at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib ran contrary to the general image of the U.S. and paled in comparison to torture meted out by Saddam Hussein. Mismanagement of the public relations aspect of the issue kept the abuse a hot topic.

112. (U) Senator Kerry departed Kuwait prior to message transmission.

113. (U) Baghdad: Minimize considered.

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